

FIVE

Theology
Book 1.

LETTERS,

V I Z.

- I. Some Conjectures concerning an Eternal Creation.
- II. That there was from Eternity a Fitness and Unfitness, in the Nature of Things, by which the Will of God was always determined.
- III. Reflections on the Duties we owe to God and one another. Together with Remarks on some of the *Jewish* Revelations. In a Dialogue between *Saul* and *Samuel*.
- IV. That God was not the First Institutor of Sacrifices, wherein the Case of *Abraham* offering up his Son, is fully reasoned; and *Moses* vindicated from the Aspersions generally thrown upon him, of making God the Author of that Command.
- V. Concerning the Evidence necessary to ascertain the Divinity of those Revelations which require us to do any Action.

Quod verum atque decens curo & rogo.

HOR.



L O N D O N :

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FIVE LETTERS

ERRATA.

I. Some Conjectures concerning an Eternal Creation.

II. That there was from Eternity a Father and an Only Son, in the Name of Things, by which the Will of God was always determined.

Page 6. Line 15. after eternal, add, as, I believe, will appear from the following Considerations, Space, &c. p. 11. l. 30. for 59, read, 57.

IV. That God was not the First Author of Sin, wherein the Case of Adam is offering up his Son, is fully resolved; and a new view is given of the Allegory of the Fall, which shows him, of making God the Author of that Corruption.

V. Concerning the Evidences necessary to ascertain the Divinity of those Revelations which require us to do any Abstinence.

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LETTERS.



L E T T E R I.
S I R,



T was not long since, that I happened to be in Company with some ingenious Friends of your Acquaintance. The Conversation turned chiefly upon this Point, *Whether or no this World was Eternal.* Many Arguments were advanced to prove that it was ; and many more, and better, to prove that it was not. I contented myself with being a *Hearer* ; and was perfectly pleased that the Subject was managed with no less Judgment, than Calmness and Moderation.

After I came home, I could not forbear reflecting upon what had passed ; and looking backward, my Imagination represented to me the *ghastly Scene* which preceded the Creation. When

I conceived *Matter* to be Eternal, nothing presented to my Mind, except *a wild Waste and Confusion* : Methought, I saw the rude Materials of this noble Machine of the Universe scattered through the *vast Extent* ; and the Poet's Description of a *Chaos* came fresh into my Mind,

*Rudis indigestaq; moles,
Nec quicquam nisi Pondus iners, congestaq; eodem
Non bene junctarum discordia Semina rerum **

Again, when I thought that Matter was created, immediately before God formed it into Worlds, I could conceive nothing but *Immensify*, a *dismal Gloom*, dark and silent. My Imagination startled at the horrid Thought; and I began to reason thus within myself. How is it possible that so active a Being, as God, should be so unactive, as for a whole Eternity to produce nothing more than if he had not existed? If it was fit and proper to create Worlds, why did he not create them, since it is acknowledged he does whatever is fit? If it was not fit to create Worlds, how came ours to be made? The Deity never does any Action except upon reasonable Motives ; and if it was ever reasonable that he should exert his Power of creating, it appears to me, that it was always so. Or, if he loved Order, and hated Confusion, and *Matter* always existed ; why was it suffered to lie a whole Eternity in a confused Mass?

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* Ovid's Metamorph. Lib. 1.

I could find no other Way of answering these Questions, except by supposing that God was creating from Eternity. It cannot be denied that, if he ever had a Power of creating, he always had it; and I can see no Absurdity in supposing that he was always exerting this Power; nay, it seems most consonant to Reason, to think, that he will make the Objects of his Goodness, boundless as his Goodness itself. If it be fit to bring Creatures into Existence, in order to make them happy, it appears to me, that as many should be made to exist, as the Being which made them can be supposed to make happy: Because if it stops at any Number, what Reason can be assigned for that? God's Power cannot be destroyed by creating; nor his Happiness exhausted by making other Beings happy: Therefore it seems most reasonable to suppose the Objects of his Bounty infinite.

It may here be objected, that an eternal Creation is an Absurdity; because *creating* being an Action, a Time must be supposed both before and after it.

I believe, this Difficulty arises rather from our Manner of conceiving, than from any Absurdity in the Thing itself: For, as we cannot, without a Contradiction, deny that God existed from Eternity; and, that he had from Eternity a Power of creating, it follows, that he might always have been exerting this Power; which, if he did, nothing is more evident, than that something has been created from Eternity. If we deny the Pos-

sibility of an eternal Creation, because we cannot conceive any Action, without conceiving a Time both before, and after it ; we must, by the same Method of Reasoning, deny the *Consciousness* of God, because a conscious Being must always be conscious of something, and Thinking being an Action of the Mind, we can as little conceive any particular Thought to have been eternal, as we can conceive Creation to have been so ; and if no particular Thought was eternal, then there was a Time when the Deity was no intelligent Being, which is absurd.

It will, perhaps, be said, that God, from all Eternity, perceived every Thing, with all its Actions and Modifications, as present with him ; and that therefore there can be no Succession of Ideas in his Mind, nor no Commencement of *particular Thoughts*. To this I answer, That God perceives Things as they really are ; and if there is no Succession of Things, or Actions, in Nature, I grant, that there may be no Succession of Ideas in his Mind : But if in this Instant I am writing, and do intend half an Hour hence to give it over, if I continue to write till that Period, I hope he does not perceive that I have given it over, when in Fact I have not. There is so much of Duration to pass (If I can be allowed so to speak) before I give over, and as I am writing in every Point, or Instant, of that Duration, he must, in every Point, or Instant, of it, perceive that I am writing ; and likewise

wife that I give it over, just when I do so, and not before. Duration is in itself absolutely immutable, and does not, as some have imagined, depend on the Motions of Bodies, or the Succession of Ideas in our Minds; for, as Sir *Isaac Newton* very justly observes, *Eadem est Duratio seu perseverantia existentiae Rerum; sive Motus sint celeres, sive tardi, sive nulli* *. From all which it is plain, that there must have been a Succession of Perceptions, or Thoughts, in the Mind of God, because there is a Succession of the Objects of those Thoughts; and if no Thought in all the Series or Succession is eternal, the Series itself cannot be eternal, and therefore, as I said before, *Intelligence* must have had a Beginning, which is a Contradiction.

If it was fit and proper that Beings should be created at all, I cannot conceive but that it must always have been so. The Fitness of Things arises from the eternal Relations which Things have to one another: And, I presume, the Fitness of creating might have arisen from the Relation which the Ideas in the Mind of God had to his immutable Nature, from which might have arisen a Fitness of making Things according to the Pattern of those Ideas. If it was so, the Relation between his Mind and his Ideas being eternal, the Fitness consequent upon that Relation must have been eternal too; and as he always acts according to Fitness, it is plain, he would

* Newt. Princip. Schol. ad Definit. 8.

would create, whenever he perceived that it was fit so to do ; and, as he is *Omniscient*, he must always have perceived that Fitness, and consequently must always have created.

Here it may be asked, Why was not our World created from Eternity, since you acknowledge, that it was eternally fit that God should create ? Where was the Fitness in making it six thousand Years ago, more than at any other Time ? Or in placing it in this Part of Space rather than any other ?

To these I beg Leave to answer : Though it was fit that God should create from Eternity, yet it does by no means follow, that our World must have been eternal : Because Space, in which all Worlds exist, is absolutely infinite, without Bounds or Limits. It would be a Contradiction to suppose it bounded, for whatever bounds it, must itself exist in it, since what exists *no where*, does not exist at all.

As Space then is absolutely infinite, I apprehend, that it is absurd to suppose it filled with Worlds, because nothing can be filled except what is finite and limited.

It is likewise impossible to make an infinite World, because, as it requires no greater Power to annihilate any Particle of Matter than it did to create it at first, we will suppose that God should annihilate one of the Particles of which this infinite World is composed, then would it be less than it was before by this one Particle ; and if

be-

before the Annihilation of the Particle, it was infinite, it cannot be so after, unless we suppose that one Infinity of the same Kind can be less than another, which is absurd. So that it was only infinite before, by the Addition of Unity to a determined Quantity, which is a Contradiction. Since then Space cannot be filled with Worlds, and since it was always fit that God should create, 'tis evident, that he must have created one System before another ; and thus there is no need of supposing our World eternal.

Our late prodigious Discoveries in Astronomy have made us sensible, what a great Dependance the Planets of our own System have upon the Sun, and upon one another. So why may not the Creation of one System, make the Creation of another necessary; as the Creation of our Planets made the Creation of the Sun necessary. Our System may have a very great Dependance upon other Systems, though, perhaps, we have not Sagacity enough to discover that Dependance. To deny this would be very unphilosophical. So the successive Creations of Systems from Eternity, might have made it fit, that *ours* should be made when it was, and not at any other Time ; as the Creation of *ours*, might make the Creation of another necessary, and so on to all Eternity.

As to the supposing it arbitrary in what Part of Space our System was placed ; I grant, that, had it been the first which was created, I cannot see, that there possibly could have been any Reason

son for preferring one Part of Space to another ; but as I admit of no *first Creatings*, so the Situation of other Systems, and their Influence upon *ours*, might determine the Deity to place *ours* where he has, rather than any *where* else.

I can think of no more Objections which can be made to what I have advanced, except it be said, that it is contrary to the Account which *Moses* gives of the Creation : He tells us, that on the fourth Day of the Creation, *God made two great Lights, the greater Light to rule the Day, and the lesser Light to rule the Night : He made the Stars also* *. Whether the latter Part of this Verse, alludes to the Light which we have from the Stars, or to their Creation, I shall not say ; but it is certain that the Words, *he made*, are interpolated. If *Moses* speaks of the Creation of the Stars, I cannot think that he meant any other Stars, than the Planets of our own System, with their attending Satellites : For it would seem strange to assert, that the making our little *Foot-Ball* of a Globe, was a sufficient Employment for the Deity for no less than five Days ; and that all those Worlds around us, some of which are many thousand Times larger than *ours*, were all created in a Day !

Thus, Sir, have I thrown my Thoughts on this abstracted Subject together, and do submit them to your Judgment ; only wishing, that I may have reasoned rightly ; for I am always
well-

* Gen. i. 16.

well pleased, when I can hit upon any Thing which tends to represent God in an amiable and honourable View. And I do really think, that the supposing he was always making Creatures, and making them happy, gives Men a more exalted Idea of him, than the supposing that he never produced any Thing till about six thousand Years ago ; but existed a whole Eternity by himself.

I am,

Your affectionate Friend,

and Servant.





LETTER II.

S I R,



OUR Observation is very just, that I suppose a Fitness, or Unfitness arising from the different Relations which Things (or the Ideas of them) have from all Eternity had to one another ; and I can see no Reason to alter my Opinion, notwithstanding the Passage you have cited from Dr. *Conybear*. However, as you seem to be of the Doctor's Sentiments in this Matter, I shall examine his Reasoning, and endeavour to shew you his Error. “ I do by no Means maintain, says he, that these Fitnesses are absolutely “ before all Will of God, and intirely independent on it. Here then we must distinguish between the Will of God, as it regards the Order and Constitution of Things, and the same Will as it regards the Actions and Conduct of his Creatures. The Fitness of Things must be “ subsequent to the Will of God, if we understand his Will in the former Sense of the Expression : For Things are therefore fit, because “ God

“ God hath constituted Nature in such a Manner
 “ as to make them so : But then it must precede
 “ God’s Will when understood in the latter Sense ;
 “ since therefore God wills Things because they
 “ are fit and proper *.” If Fitness had no Ex-
 istence before the Creation, how came God to
 constitute Nature in the Way he has ? If no one
 Way was more proper than another, how could
 Wisdom and Design appear in his Workmanship ?
 This is making the Creation nothing but
 the Frolic of Omnipotence, and therefore it
 is a Notion which throws an impious Reflection
 on God : Though I believe the good-natured
Divine did not advert to this Consequence of
 it.

Since the Deity is omniscient, the Ideas of all
 Things which have existed, or will exist, must
 have been from Eternity in his Mind ; and it is
 impossible they could be there without having Re-
 lations to one another : And from these Relations
 follows an Agreement, or Disagreement, of
 some Things with others ; or a Fitness, or Unfit-
 ness, in the Application of these different Rela-
 tions, or different Ideas to one another. Where-
 ever the Ideas of a Triangle, and two Right-
 Angles are, some Truths necessarily result from
 comparing those Ideas together, *e. g.* the two
 Right-Angles are equal to the three Angles of the

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Tri-

* *Conybear’s Defence of Reveal’d Religion against Tindal,*
 p. 56, 59.

Triangle. Where-ever the Ideas of a Triangle, and Parallelogram, of equal Bases and Altitudes are, 'tis impossible that a Mind capable of comparing them together, should not perceive that the Area of the Triangle is one Half less than the Area of the Parallelogram. These Truths necessarily flow from the Nature of the Ideas themselves, and are unalterable by the Will of any Being, since it is impossible to make a Triangle a Circle, and yet let it retain all the Properties of a Triangle. Now are these Things only true, because God has been pleased to constitute human Minds in such a Manner as to think them so? Suppose it should be reveal'd from Heaven, that all parallel Lines shall meet for the future, will those equi-distant Lines upon this cordially incline towards one another, and continue to be Parallels? None will assert this, who knows what a Parallel Line is.

The Fitness or Unfitness arising from the Application of different Ideas, or of the Relations which different Ideas have to one another, holds in Morality, as well as in Mathematicks. The Ideas of *Father and Son, Husband and Wife*, were from Eternity in the Divine Mind, as well as the Ideas of a Triangle and Parallelogram. These Ideas have Relations to one another, and from those Relations a Fitness of Action or Behaviour, necessarily arises, by which Beings (of which God always had an Idea) were to be guided whenever they came

came into Existence. Thus it was fit that a Parent should take Care of his own Child, and not suffer it to perish, when in his Power to prevent it. This follows from the helpless Condition of the Child, and the natural Affection, and Expectations of the Parent : And this Behaviour flows as necessarily from the Relation between them, as the Proportion of Equality flows from the Relation between the three Angles of a Triangle, and two right Angles. It was incumbent on all Parents and Children, to act as the Fitness consequent upon the Relation between them, directed, tho' it had not been commanded by God ; nay, even tho' they had been commanded to act otherwise. So that the Fitness of Things is independent of the Will of God.

As it was always the Will of the Deity that rational Beings should act as Fitness required, it is plain that a Fitness has always been, which was the Ground, or Foundation of his Will. And though both his Will, and that Fitness are eternal, and therefore one cannot be said to precede the other in the Order of Time ; yet in the Order of our Ideas, we conceive Fitness first, and his Will as consequent upon it.

From what I have said, I think it is evident, that the Distinction which Dr. *Conybear* makes between the Will of God, as it regards the Order and Constitution of Things, and the same Will as it regards the Actions and Conduct of his Creatures,

tures, is a Distinction without any Difference. For as all rational Beings ought to act only upon rational Motives, so if there be no such Motives, they must act foolishly in acting at all. And if there was no Fitness, or no reasonable Motive, to influence the Will of God, before the Creation of this World ; it is plain, he must have done that Action without any reasonable Motive : The Consequence of this is, denying his *Wisdom*. For Wisdom consists in chusing the fittest Means for obtaining any End ; and if there was no Fitness to determine the Mind of God, then could he not have preferred one Way to another, and consequently no Wisdom could appear in his Actions. So that unless we deny that the Deity is a wise Being, and thereby recur to down-right Atheism, we must allow that there has been a Fitness which influenced his Will from all Eternity.

As we are rational Creatures, this Fitness ought to be the Rule of our Actions, otherwise we will act contrary to our Natures ; and not only to us ought it to be a Rule, but to all the Orders of Intelligences above us ; even, as I said before, to the supreme Being himself. The acting in Conformity to it must constitute his Happiness, as well as it does the Happiness of all other rational Beings.

Thus, Sir, have I given you my Reasons why I differ from Dr. *Conybear* in this Particular. I do believe he did not advert to the Consequences of

of his Doctrine ; otherwife, I am fure, he would not have maintained it : For he has wrote with that Good-nature, Candor, and Ingenuity, which becomes a Gentleman, and a Minifter of the Goſpel ; he ſeems intirely free of that fierce Spirit, which, I am ſorry to ſay, is but too common among thoſe of his Order. If you are not ſatisfied with my Reasoning on this Subject, be ſo good as to ſend me your Objections, and I will endeavour to ſolve them to the utmoſt of my Power.

I am, &c.



L E T-



LETTER III.

S I R,



A M very well pleased that you approve of my Reasoning concerning Fitness. It is very certain, unless we allow that it always influences the Will of God, we have no Criterion whereby to distinguish Religion from Superstition : For a Being that has no reasonable Rule to act by, can only will and act as Whim and Caprice direct, and what it commands to Day, it may forbid to-morrow.

I shall now, according to your Desire, make a few Observations on the Nature of Man ; the Relation he stands in to God ; and the Duties resulting from that Relation.

Man is a Creature composed of an organized Body, joined to a rational Soul, which directs and enables him to act. He is in his own Nature sociable, and placed in a Society with others of the same Rank. He cannot support himself without the Assistance of others ; therefore it is his Interest to be kind and beneficent to all, since he wants an equal Return from them. Such is the

Con-

Constitution of his Mind, that he cannot act reasonably without feeling an inward Satisfaction ; nor unreasonably without being unhappy. His Design in all his Actions is to procure Happiness to himself. There is in Man then, no Propensity to do Evil, purely considered as such, since no Being will chuse to be miserable, when it is in its Power to be happy. It is but too true, that he frequently mistakes in his Conduct, and seeks Happiness where it is not to be found. This is owing to his forsaking Reason, and not keeping an exact Discipline over his Passions, whose only Business is to obey. As a Creature he must be limited in all his Faculties, since it is impossible for any created Being to be absolutely perfect *. His Passions
D frequently

* For one Being to make another as perfect as itself, is, I presume, absurd. I shall exemplify this in Relation to Power. I believe it will not be denied, that it is in God's Power to annihilate any Being which he has created. Now supposing him to create a Being perfectly powerful, this Being must be omnipotent ; and if it be omnipotent, it will not be in God's Power to annihilate it, because it has an equal Force to resist him. This Being can, if it pleases, intirely destroy the Power of God, because having a Power, equal to his, it can hinder him from doing any Thing which it thinks disagreeable to it. Thus we see that no Creature can be perfectly powerful ; therefore it is no Imputation on God to make Beings weak, in all possible Degrees. He may make Creatures more and more powerful ; yet by this Progression he can no more make one perfectly powerful, than the *Assymtotes* of the *Hyperbola* can touch it, though they are always approaching nearer and nearer to it. God, doubtless, makes all his Creatures as perfect as is necessary for the Perfection of that *Universal Whole* of which they are Parts. And if some among them would seriously consider this, perhaps they might find some better Reason, why they are not more perfect, than they seem yet to have found. I

frequently lead him astray, yet they are so far from being a Defect in his Constitution, that they are absolutely necessary. Without them he would neither seek Happiness, nor avoid Misery. They spur him on to Action, and set him upon pursuing Happiness, which consists in a reasonable Gratification of them.

The Idea which Men form of God is, that he is an infinite Mind, possessed of all moral and natural Perfections. We were created, and are preserved by him, from which Relation several Duties result ; he has given us Faculties to discover these Duties ; he has annexed Rewards and Punishments to the Performance, or Non-performance of them ; these are founded on the immutable Nature of Things, and the Constitution of our Minds, whereby we are rewarded, or punished, according as we act reasonably, or unreasonably. From the Relation we stand in to God, it follows, that we are gratefully to acknowledge him, as the Author and Giver of all Things ; we are to reverence,

am afraid that their Pride makes them consider themselves as Beings of a higher Class than God intended they should be. Indeed, to say, *that God made Men perfect*, is saying neither more nor less than this, *that God made Men Gods* : It is not my present Purpose, to take Notice of what some Men tell us, of the original Dignity of human Nature. I only wish, what they advance, may not be found, upon Examination, to reflect upon God himself. If God made a Race of Creatures, to act such a Part, as some Way or other tended to promote a *general Good*, and gave them sufficient Powers and Abilities to act that Part ; and if another Being of a wicked Disposition, should (by the Help of a Genius, superior to theirs) influence them to act a quite contrary Part, they would be like the String of a *Violin* out of Tune in a Consort ; they would spoil the whole Harmony of Nature.

rence, worship, and adore him, and to do nothing contrary to his Will. These Duties plainly result from this Relation, and Reason at once declares them fit. Here it must be observed, that these Duties result from this Relation only on the Supposition that God is perfectly good ; for was it otherwise, how could we adore him, or not act contrary to his Will ? Adoration implies honourable Conceptions of him ; and these again an Idea of Honour antecedent to them ; and true Honour is opposite to all Deformity. Could we be obliged to act according to his Will, if it be not always determined by the Fitness of Things ? No sure. So that in this Case, as in all others, our Duty consists in acting according to that Fitness.

Whatever religious Worship we pay to the Deity, it is on our own Account. He being infinitely happy, can receive no Advantage from our imperfect Service ; therefore Religion must consist in a pure and vertuous Course of Life ; and in taking such Measures as tend to cultivate in us a good Disposition of Soul. VERTUE being the Perfection of our rational Natures, all religious Rites must have a Tendency to make us vertuous.

From hence it is plain, that nothing which favours of Cruelty, or runs counter to Humanity, can be a Part of religious Worship, since that tends to make us worse Men, by destroying that natural Pity, and sympathizing Disposition, which is so

needful to excite the like in others, when we want their Help. Likewise,

Cruel Rites in Religion imply, that God is of a cruel Disposition, otherwise he could take no Delight in them. Did the *Ammonites* conceive their God *Moloch* to be a kind, merciful, and Benevolent Being, when they sacrificed their Children to him? No. Had they not conceived him to be of an opposite Character, they never would have worshipped him in that dreadful Way. They must likewise have been *thorough Believers*, for nothing less could serve to overcome that *natural Affection* which Parents have for their Children. But when *Enthusiasm* is of this dark and horrible Kind, as it frequently is in some Constitutions, then dreadful are its Effects! No Tye of Humanity will be strong enough to restrain the poor *Devotee* from perpetrating the vilest Crimes, when he imagines that it is for the Service of God.

Tantum Religio potuit suadere malorum!

What has been said concerning religious Worship, may be likewise applied to divine Revelations. For we can never conceive that the all-merciful God of Nature will give a Command, destructive of that benevolent Disposition which he has imprinted on our Nature. This naturally leads me to take Notice of some Passages in the *Jewish History*, where God is represented as commanding Things, which in themselves were cruel.

My

My Lord Shaftesbury observes, “ That the
 “ *Jews* were naturally a very cloudy People —
 “ and looked upon Religion with a sullen Eye. †”
 They were of a melancholly Disposition, which,
 perhaps, made their Prophets sometimes mistake,
 and take Things for divine Revelations which
 were only the Effects of their *national Distemper*.
 Whether or no the Commission which *Samuel*
 gave to *Saul*, ordering him to go and destroy the
Amalekites, was of this Kind, I leave you to judge.
 And that you may pass a Judgment upon it the
 more easily, I will suppose a Dialogue between
 the Prophet and his Master, as follows ;

Samuel. I am sent by the Lord, to tell thee,
 to go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that
 they have, both Man and Woman, Infant and Suck-
 ling, Ox and Sheep, Camel and As *.

Saul. Pray, *Samuel*, is there any Reason assign-
 ed for this Command in thy Revelation ? I am,
 thou sayest, to go and destroy the *Amalekites* ;
 what have they done to deserve such Treatment at
 my Hands ?

Sam. Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, I remember
 that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait
 for him in the Way, when he came up from Egypt †.
 This is the Reason assigned, and in my Opinion,
 it is a very sufficient one.

Sam.

† Shaftesbury's Letter of Enthusiasm, p. 29.

* 1 Sam. xv. 3.

† Ibid. xv. 2.

Saul. I am very glad that there is a Reason given; for from that I infer, that I am to be satisfied in a reasonable Way.

Sam. Doubtless.

Saul. Are those *Amalekites* alive who behaved so barbarously to our itinerant Ancestors?

Sam. What dost thou mean by that?

Saul. My Meaning is very obvious. I am not satisfied how I can in Justice punish Men for Crimes, which I am conscious they are not guilty of. Tho' they are called *Amalekites*, yet they are no more those *Amalekites*, than thou and I, *Samuel*, are *Moses* and *Aaron*.

Sam. But the present Race are as wicked, and deserve the same Punishment which ought to have been inflicted on their impious Fore-Fathers.

Saul. Is that Reason contained in thy Revelation, or is it only thine own private Opinion?

Sam. What Occasion for a Revelation to make known a Fact notorious to all Mankind? No, *Saul*, it is my own Opinion.

Saul. Very well. Let me first be satisfied about the Revelation, and then I will examine the Justness of thy private Reasons. I have already observed, that the present Race of the *Amalekites* are as innocent of the Crime, laid to their Charge in thy Revelation, as thou and I, and are therefore no fitter Objects of Punishment for it. Now, if thou hadst a Revelation commissioning thee to kill me, without assigning a sufficient Reason for so doing, wouldst thou obey without Hesitation, tho'

tho' even thy own Life should be endangered in executing thy Commission?

Sam. I ———

Saul. As thou dost hesitate in answering my Question, I can easily judge how thou wouldst behave; thou wouldst expostulate with the Lord, till he fell upon some Expedient to make thy Life secure. And may not I do as much for my Conscience, as I perceive thou wouldst do for thy Life?

Sam. Without Doubt, for Life is of no Value without a good Conscience.

Saul. Then tell me, *Samuel!* How can I obey? Represent to thy Mind the bloody Scene of my Campaign. I go to *Amalek*; meet *Agag* in the Field; fight and rout him; perhaps he raises another Army, I again beat that, and by that Time have destroyed most of the Males in his Dominions. I then attack his Cities.——But say, O Seer! How can I attack them? nay, how can I look these Enemies in the Face! My Foes are only then, such as I have irreparably wronged, and such as are forlorn and helpless. Disconsolate Widows, weeping Virgins, and tender Babes. These, I say, are the Foes against whom I must lead the Armies of the Lord! To repair the Widows Losses in butchering their Husbands, they must be murdered! The beautiful Maids too, they must die! Can I be here inexorable; forget to be a Man; and give no Ear to their Supplications to whom Nature has been so bountiful? Were delicate

cate Constitutions only given them, to heighten their Misery, and reproach me with their Fall ! And the poor, innocent Infants ! Must I compensate their Losses by stabbing them to the Heart ! And is their Stock daily encreasing, only to add to the Number of the Victims ! Say, *Samuel* ! How art thou pleased with the Representation of these Deeds ?

Sam. I cannot say I am pleased with them ; yet I am sure I had a Revelation commissioning you to do them.

Saul. Is it not reasonable that I should be sure too ?

Sam. And art thou not sure ? From whom wouldst thou know the Will of the Lord, except from the Mouth of his own Prophet ? Thou art not ignorant that I have given sufficient Evidence of my being inspired before, and why scruple in believing me now, more than at any other Time ?

Saul. Thy former Revelations had nothing in them contrary to my Reason, and so I easily believed thee. Tho' I could depend much upon thy Word ; yet judge impartially ; consider the Nature of the Affair, and tell me, is it not hard, exceeding hard, for me to act against the Dictates of my own clear Knowledge, and sacrifice my Reason, my Humanity, and all that is noble in my Nature, to the Veracity of a Man, fallible as myself ? *

Sam.

* " A Revelation, says Dr. *Tillotson*, made to another Man is nothing to me, unless, I be assured, that he hath such a Revelation, which I cannot be, but either by another immediate Revelation, or by some Miracle to confirm it." *Tillot. Works*, Fol. Edit. Vol. II. p. 11.

Sam. Nay, *Saul*, if thou art come this Length, and opposest thy Reason to the Will of the *Most High*: Farewel *URIM* and *THUMMIM*; the Dignity of the House of *Levi* will be no more!

Saul. Why talkest thou at this Rate, *Samuel*? Sure I am, thou hadst no Commission to be angry with me: For it must be well-pleasing to the God of *Jacob* to observe the *Chief* of his *chosen People*, obstinate in submitting to the Dictates of his Conscience, and inviolably adhering to what he thinks Truth; therefore I cannot see how the Priesthood, which was instituted for supporting Religion and Vertue, can suffer by Men being *honest* and *religious*.

Sam. I again tell thee, I had a Revelation; I have delivered it; and if thou wilt not obey, look thou to that.

Saul. Why so short and testy, *Samuel*! Thy Conduct now forces into my Mind a thousand little Thoughts, which otherwise I had (probably) never adverted to. I remember when the supreme Authority was by thee conferred on thy two Sons, *Joel* and *Abiah*, though *they walked not in thy Ways, but turned aside after Lucre, and took Bribes, and perverted Judgment* *. Yet wast thou displeased that the Administration was taken out of their Hands, and didst represent the Office of a King in such a Manner as sufficiently indicated thy Dissatisfaction. Thou art conscious to thyself that I have acted with more Moderation and Benevolence; nay,
E now

* 1 Sam. viii, 2, 3.

now thou art angry with me, because the Love of Mankind is predominate in my Mind †. Likewise thou mayst remember, that not long ago the *Philistines* invaded our Country with an Army, *numeros as the Sand on the Sea Shore*. My People were astonished at their Numbers, and hid themselves in *Thickets, and in Rocks, and in High Places, and in Pits* *. Seven Days I waited for thee at *Gilgal*, according to thy Desire, still expecting thou wouldst have come, and made Supplications to the Lord that *Israel* might be delivered from that impendent Ruin. Thou camest not at the appointed Time; I unwillingly took thy Office upon me; I sacrificed, and made Supplications to the Lord, thinking they would be acceptable, as coming from a sincere Heart. Tho' the Breach of thy Word was the Cause of my acting in thy Character, yet I remember what thou saidst on that Occasion †. This Breach of thy Word shews that thou art subject to the Vices of Men: And if I cannot reign

† “ Notwithstanding, says Lord Shaftesbury, the pious
 “ Endeavours which, as devout Christians, we may have
 “ used in order to separate ourselves from the Interests of
 “ mere *Heathens* and *Infidels*; notwithstanding the true Pains
 “ which we may have taken, to arm our Hearts in Behalf of
 “ a *chosen People*, against their neighbouring Nations of a
 “ false Religion and Worship; there will still be found such
 “ Partiality remaining in us, towards Creatures of the same
 “ Make and Figure with ourselves, as will hinder us from
 “ viewing with Satisfaction the Punishment inflicted by hu-
 “ man Hands on such *Aliens* and *Idolaters*.” Characterist.
 Vol. I. p. 35.

* 1 Sam. xiii. 5, 6.

† Ibid. xiii. 13, 14.

reign without imbruing my Hands in innocent Blood, take back the Crown thou gavest; confer it upon a Man fitter for thy Purpose, and I will retire, and pass the Residue of my Days in peaceful Innocence, and under the Direction of that Guide, by the Observance of whose Precepts, I forfeited the Crown of *Israel*!

I think I have said what is sufficient to persuade thee that thou hast been mistaken in thy Revelation; I shall now consider that which thou didst advance as thy private Opinion, and shew thee, that it has as little Reason to support it as thy Revelation. Thou sayst, the present Race of the *Amalekites* are great Sinners. Now this can be no Warrant for me to destroy them in the Terms of thy Revelation, because the Children have not yet sinned, nor have the Cattle committed Iniquity. How then can I punish them as Sinners, who never sinned? Is not this to act a Lie? Does the God of Truth give such Commissions? I am certain he does not.

Sam. Now, *Saul*, I have heard thee patiently; allow me to question in my Turn.

Saul. With all my Heart.

Sam. May not the Deity, for some End which we are ignorant of, give such a Command as I had from him? Thou canst not but be sensible how scanty our Knowledge is; we are Parts of an *universal Whole*, so Actions may have a Tendency to promote the general Good, which to us, who have not Sagacity to discover that Tendency,

may appear to be *Ill*, and productive of general *Mischief*. Why then may not the Destruction of the *Amalekites* produce a general Good, though we cannot perceive the Manner how? Think humbly in these Matters, and submit to the Will of *him* who knows all Things, and orders all Things for the best.

Saul. That Argument of thine proves quite too much, *Samuel*. What Action is there but may be defended in thy Way? The only Criterion I have to distinguish true Revelations, from Delusions, is, their Tendency to promote the Good of Mankind *. And we, to whom they are made, must be Judges of that Tendency, otherwise we have no Criterion at all; for our Duty can never go beyond our Knowledge: If we quit the clear Dictates of Reason for Conjectures, we shall soon find ourselves in such Circumstances as will render us either the Objects of Mirth or Pity.

Sam. What thou sayst is in some Measure true; it would, no doubt, be ridiculous to quit the clear Dictates of Reason for Conjectures: yet, notwithstanding all thou hast advanced, I am certain that I had the Revelation from God, because it was made in the same Manner in which all my former ones were made; *i. e.* I felt the like Impressions upon my Mind, and therefore can find

* The *New Testament* supposes we have this Criterion which I put in *Saul's* Mouth. We are ordered to try the Spirits, whether they are of God. 1 John iv. 1. Our Saviour tells us, *If any Man will do the Will of God, he shall know of the Doctrine whether it be of God*, John vii. 17.

find no Reason to doubt of its Divinity. However, as I perceive that thou art apt to turn too warm, and take too great Liberties in thy Discourse, I believe it will not be improper to defer the Prosecution of this Debate, till a more favourable Opportunity.

Saul. It is not unlikely that we have both been too warm, and since thou propos'st the deferring this Subject, I agree to it with all my Heart.

Thus, Sir, have I given you a short Dialogue between those two great Men. I am not insensible that this is a very difficult Manner of writing, especially upon so tender a Subject. For if every Man is made to speak in Character, then some *Zealots* be offended, when an *Infidel* is introduced, to hear him say Things which are only natural to him. If to please such People, the *Infidel* is only made to advance such weak Arguments as his Adversary can easily confute, then would the *Infidels* complain that Injustice was done to their Cause. Thus you see, he must have a very hard Task who would be a *Moderator* between them. I have not brought the Argument to a Conclusion, being sensible that you can carry it much farther, than either I incline, or pretend to do. You may observe, that the abrupt Manner of breaking off, is owing to *Samuel's* Politeness and Complaisance, in not insisting too much upon a Subject, at a Time when

when he perceived his Prince too obstinate to be easily convinced.

I shall conclude this Letter with this single Reflection, that if Men would think as kindly on the Deity, as they do on Humanity *, we should see nothing sour or morose in Religion; it would by no Means render us fierce, savage, and intractable, nor set us upon butchering and sacrificing one another

* " The melancholly Way of treating Religion, is that which renders it too tragical, and is in reality the Occasion of its acting such Tragedies in the World.—The melancholly Way in which we have been taught Religion, makes us unapt to think of it in good Humour. It is in Adversity chiefly, or in ill Health, under Affliction, or Disturbance of Mind, or Discomposure of Temper, that we have Recourse to it. Though in reality we are never so unfit to think of it as at such a heavy and dark Hour. We can never be fit to contemplate any Thing above us, when we are in no Condition to look into ourselves, and calmly to examine the Temper of our own Minds and Passions. For then it is we see Wrath, and Fury, and Revenge, and Terrors in the Deity; when we are full of Disturbances and Fears within, and have by Sufferance and Anxiety, lost so much of the natural Calm and Easiness of our Temper.

" We must not only be in good Humour, but in the very best of Humours, and in the sweetest, kindest Disposition of our Lives, to understand well what *true Goodness* is, and what those Attributes imply, which we ascribe with such Applause, and Honour to the Deity. We shall then be able to see best, whether those Forms of Justice, those Degrees of Punishment, that Temper of Resentment, and those Measures of Offence and Indignation, which we vulgarly suppose in God, are suitable to those original Ideas of *Goodness*, which the same divine Being, or Nature under him, has imprinted in us, and which we must necessarily presuppose, in order to give him Praise or Honour in any Kind. This is the Security against all Superstition: To remember that there is nothing in God, but what is *God-like*; and that he either is not at all, or perfectly Good." Characterist. Vol. I. p. 32, 33.

ther. It is a *reasonable Service*, and can never influence us to do any Thing which is unreasonable. It has a *natural Tendency* to improve our Minds, and polish our Manners; since a kind and benevolent Disposition, is absolutely necessary to qualify us for being Members of that pure Society which is to be eternal.

I am, &c.



L E T-

Disposition is absolutely necessary to qualify as
for the purpose of the new society which is

Page 1

My Lord *Shaftesbury* observes, “ That in the
“ early Times of all Religions, when Nations
“ were yet Barbarous and Savage, there was ever
“ an Aptness or Tendency towards the dark Part
“ of Superstition, which, among many other
Horror,

* See a Pamphlet intitled, Christianity near as old as the Creation, p. 10.

“ Horrors produced that of *human Sacrifice* *.”
 And the Reason of that *Aptness* or *Tendency*, perhaps may be this, Men commonly ascribe to the Deity those Qualities which they admire in themselves ; hence the Character of God may vary, according to the Tempers, Constitutions, and Opinions of Mankind : Thus a savage and barbarous People will form to themselves the Idea of a God of the same Character ; and will act consistently enough in worshiping him in a bloody and brutal Way. More consistently, God knows ! than some have acted in latter Times, who, tho’ they professed to worship a good and merciful God, have yet besmeared his Altars with the Blood of Millions !

Lord *Herbert*, who has been at very great Pains to search the Writings of the Ancients, in order to form a right Judgment of their Religion, ascribes the Origin of Sacrifices to the Knavery of the Priests, who, the better to support their own Craft, introduced the Worship of inferior Deities, whom they called *Subcœlestial Gods*. His Lordship introduces the Priests, as describing the Nature of these Gods, and their Worship, to the People thus, “ It is very requisite to procure the subcœlestial Gods to be propitious, because being uncertain in their Nature ; they sometimes incline one Way, sometimes another, for Causes that we are not altogether ignorant of. The best Way is, to offer up something pleasing and grateful to them. What this is must be discovered from their
 F “ corporeal

* Characterist. Vol. III. p. 124.

“ corporeal Natures, which being supposed to
 “ be composed of *Air* and *Æther* ; some good
 “ Things ought to be prepared for them of the
 “ gross Elements, reduced to a more subtile Sub-
 “ stance (for they want Nutriment, and by this
 “ Means their elementary Nature is refreshed by
 “ cognate Elements) and in regard they are plea-
 “ sed with the Smell of Fat ; the Animals pleasant
 “ and agreeable to their Taste and Smell should
 “ be sacrificed to them. For some fine Spirits
 “ that are made in the *Liver, Heart* and *Brain*,
 “ do ascend upwards, and are therefore the Ob-
 “ jects of Adoration. ——— The Priests having
 “ discarded the most solid Parts of their own Re-
 “ ligion, they debauched the Minds of Men with
 “ most tremendous Rites and Ceremonies, offering
 “ up human Sacrifices to their Gods ; until that
 “ Custom was at last abolished by the *Romans*
 “ and other Nations. Still, notwithstanding, the
 “ pure Worship of the *supreme God* was made
 “ to consist of no other Sacrifices, but such as
 “ they devoured *.” Thus did the *Heathen*
 Priests model their Religion to support them-
 selves ; and contrive Sacrifices, that they might
 feast upon the best Pieces, allowing their Gods
 only such as were not agreeable to their own
Palate.

Moses, who doubtless is the oldest *Historian* now ex-
 tant, informs us, that this Custom of sacrificing was
 of very old standing, but he does not say, that any
 of the first *Sacrificers* had a divine Revelation com-
 manding them to do so, till the Time of his great
Sire, Abraham, who was tempted by God to *sacrifice*
his Son Isaac †. From Reason, and *Moses's* History,
 it would seem that *Abraham* had no absolutely
 certain

* Herbert's Ancient Religion of the Gentiles, Chap. xiv.
 p. 281, 290, 291.

† Gen. xxii, 2.

certain Criterion whereby to distinguish Revelations from the *Phantasms* of his own Mind ; as I believe will appear from the following Considerations.

Whoever has formed to himself just Notions of God, will easily perceive, that it is directly contrary to the *supreme Rectitude of his all-perfect Mind*, to command any Thing which is contrary to Reason, or the Fitness of Things : Likewise, it is as contrary to his Nature to suppose, he will give a Command, *which he does not intend should be obeyed* ; for this would be Disingenuity in the most extensive Sense, and therefore not to be ascribed to the most *upright of Beings*.

When Man comes into the World, he is in a forlorn and helpless Condition, destitute of the Means of supporting himself ; and had there been no Affection implanted in Parents to influence them to take Care of their Young, it is plain our Species must have ended in the first Individuals. The common *Father* of Mankind, therefore, has implanted in every *one* a strong Affection for those he begets : This Affection, by Reason of its great Power, and peculiar Usefulness, we stile by way of Eminence, NATURAL AFFECTION ; so strong is it, that it binds Men of all Ranks, and of all Constitutions, even those who are bad Countrymen, and shew little Humanity towards their Fellow-creatures, are notwithstanding found kind and indulgent Parents. When *any* are found so void of this Affection, as to lay violent Hands on their own *Off-spring*, it, for the most Part, happens that they are *Lunaticks*.

Can we ever conceive then, that the *God of Truth* will contradict himself, and by an express Command, take away the Obligation of an Affection so necessary for the Preservation of the human Species ? He gave it : It is as needful now as it was at

the Beginning ; therefore, will not the taking it away be an *unfit Action* ? If he will in any one Instance act contrary to the Fitness of Things, what Reason can be offered why he will not do so in all Cases ; then where are all those Beauties which are discovered in the Contemplation of him ? *Omnipotence*, not under the Direction of Wisdom and Goodness ; frightful Idea !

How then could *Abraham* be certain that God commanded him to sacrifice his Son *Isaac* ? His Evidence arose only from *Sense* ; *God spoke to him* *. And is this sufficient to invalidate the contrary Evidence of Reason ? — I see the House turning round, is it really so ? — No ; you only imagine it. — How so ? — Because it is unreasonable to suppose it. — And is it not as unreasonable to imagine you hear the great God commanding you to do an unfit Action ? — There is no doubt of it, and *Abraham* did not consider the Matter thoroughly, otherwise he could not have believed it ; for, as Mr. *Locke* very well observes, “no Proposition can be received for divine Revelation, or obtain the Assent due to all such, if it be contradictory to our clear Knowledge †.”

It is indeed strange and unaccountable, that this great *Favourite* of Heaven should never say one Word for the Preservation of his only Son ! He, who at another Time was so importunate with his God for the saving two wicked and abominable Cities ‡. How natural would an Expostulation to this Purpose have been in the Patriarch's Mouth. “ O kind, and beneficent God ! Does this Command, contrary both to thy Nature and mine, come from thee ! *Isaac* is thy Gift, and the Darling of my Soul ! How can I get over this “ sacred

* Gen. xxii. 1.

† Essay on Human Understanding, Vol. II. ch. 18. Sect. 5.

‡ Gen. xviii. 23—33.

“ sacred Affection thou hast planted in me ? Say,
 “ O God ! Must I lay violent Hands upon
 “ my Son, mine only Son *Isaac* ? Must I com-
 “ mit the most cruel Action in Obedience to the
 “ Will of the most merciful Being ? What will
 “ the *Idolaters* around me, now say of the God
 “ of *Abraham* ? Can I now extol thy Mercy and
 “ Goodness in giving him, since as a consequence
 “ thereof I must act so deep a Tragedy ? The
 “ very Thought of it distracts my Soul ! O, my
 “ God, take Pity on thy Servant *Abraham* ! If I
 “ must do it, give me a Heart harder than *Ada-*
 “ mant, and let my *Understanding* be sunk below
 “ the Level of the Brute-creation. O may these
 “ Hands never be so employed while Reason re-
 “ mains in *Abraham* ! Reason will upbraid me,
 “ and root out all amiable Conceptions of thee
 “ out of my Mind. What ! act contrary to Rea-
 “ son to please an infinitely reasonable Being ! If
 “ I can go the Length to believe this, then
 “ will all my Faculties be rendered useless, and the
 “ most excellent Part of thy Works, the *Under-*
 “ *standing*, will be in vain.” I do not know but
 the holy Man would have been better employed in
 expostulating thus, than in *sadling his Ass, and*
cleaving Wood, to burn his own Son *.

I would not be thought to omit any Thing
 which may be said to justify *Abraham's* Conduct
 in this Particular. The Apostle *Paul* tells us,
 “ By Faith *Abraham*, when he was tried, offered
 “ up *Isaac*, and he who received the Promises,
 “ offered up his only begotten Son, of whom it
 “ was said, that in *Isaac* shall thy Seed be called;
 “ accounting that God was able to raise him up
 “ from the Dead : From whence also he had re-
 “ ceived him in a Figure †, ——— And the Angel
 of

* Gen. xxii. 2.

† Heb. xi. 17.—20.

of the Lord called to Abraham out of Heaven, and said, Lay not thy Hand upon the Lad, neither do thou any Thing unto him : For now I know that thou fearest God, since thou hast not with-held thy Son, thine only Son from me *. All that these Texts prove is, that Abraham believed his Son would be raised from the Dead ; and that he would scruple at nothing to please his God : But they say not one Word of the Grounds of Certainty which Abraham had, to believe that the Command was divine. His Judgment is no where commended, and I am so far from disputing his Faith, that I think he had quite too much ; and account it rather a vulgar Credulity, than a true, rational, religious Faith, according to the Acceptation of that Word in the New Testament.

Faith in God can be founded on no other Bottom, than on an Idea of his Goodness and Rectitude. Whoever believes that the Deity acts according to the Fitness of Things, and in Conformity thereto, acts reasonably himself, may be said to have true Faith : He who does not believe this, but rather the contrary, cannot in any Propriety of Expression, be said to have Faith in God. According to the Apostle James, “ We are to shew “ our Faith by our Works †,” and how the committing, or the attempting to commit Actions morally evil and deformed, can be a Sign of true Faith, is to me inconceivable. But,

Supposing Abraham to believe that God could raise his Son from the Dead, which is all the Length Paul goes. What then? Who ever denied that God has a Power of raising from the Dead whom he pleases? There surely cannot be more Difficulty (if so much) in raising one from the Dead, than there is in creating at first, which
we

* Gen. xxii. 11, 12.

† Jam. ii. 18.

we make no Doubt of. If God had caused *Isaac* to die, and then brought him to Life again, we could no more have objected against that, than against the Resurrection of *Lazarus*. But the Question stands plainly thus, How could *Abraham* be certain, that any Thing was divinely revealed, which was so directly contrary to Reason? In this Case, did he not lie under two contrary Obligations? Under one from Reason, which is unalterable, and which plainly bound him, and would have shewn him (had he averted to it) that taking away his Son's Life without any Fault, was a cruel and unjust Thing. Under another from the (supposed) express Command of God; and consequently let him obey either, he sinned by not obeying the other, which is absurd.

Archbishop *Tillotson* has wrote a Sermon to prove the Reasonableness of *Abraham's* Conduct in Relation to the Sacrifice of his Son; so I believe it will be proper to consider his *Grace's* Reasoning on this Subject. “ Human Nature, says he, is “ capable of clear and full Satisfaction, concerning a divine Revelation. For if *Abraham* had “ not been fully, and past all doubt, assured, that “ this was a Command from God, he would “ certainly have spared his Son. And nothing is “ more reasonable, than to believe, that those, to “ whom God is pleased to make immediate “ Revelations of his Will, are some way or “ other assured that they are divine, otherwise “ they would be in vain and to no purpose. But “ how Men are assured concerning divine Revelations made to them, is not so easy to make “ out to others; only these two Things we are “ sure of.

1. “ That God can work in the Mind of Man “ a firm Persuasion of the Truth of what he reveals, and that such a Revelation is from him.

This

“ This no Man can doubt of, that considers the
 “ great Power and Influence which God, who
 “ made us, and perfectly knows our Frame,
 “ must needs have upon our Minds and Under-
 “ standings.

“ 2. That God never offers any thing to a
 “ Man’s Belief, which plainly contradicts the
 “ natural and essential Notions of his Mind;
 “ because this would be for God to destroy his
 “ own Workmanship, and to impose that upon
 “ the Understanding of Man, which, whilst it
 “ remains what it is, it cannot possibly admit *.”

His Grace has been pleased elsewhere to tell us,
 how we may discern between true and counterfeit
 Revelations. It will not, I believe be amiss to cite
 his Words here. “ Reason, says he, is the Fa-
 “ culty whereby Revelations are to be discerned.
 “ For all Revelation from God supposes us to be
 “ Men, and to be endued with Reason; and
 “ therefore it does not create new Faculties in us,
 “ but propounds new Objects to that Faculty
 “ which was in us before. Whatever Doctrines
 “ God reveals to Men are propounded to their
 “ Understandings, and by this Faculty we are to
 “ examine all Doctrines which pretend to be from
 “ God; and, upon Examination, to judge whe-
 “ ther there be Reason to receive them as *Divine*,
 “ or reject them as *Impostures*.—All Reasonings
 “ about divine Revelations must necessarily be
 “ governed by the Principles of natural Religion:
 “ That is, by those Apprehensions which Men
 “ naturally have of the divine Perfections, and
 “ the clear Notions of Good and Evil imprinted
 “ upon our Natures; because we have no other
 “ Way to judge what is worthy of God, and
 “ credible to be revealed by him, and what not,
 “ but by the natural Notions which we have of
 “ God

* Tillot. Works, Vol. II. p. 14.

“ God, and of his essential Perfections : Which,
 “ because we know him to be immutable, we
 “ have Reason to believe he will never contradict.
 “ And by these Principles likewise, we are to in-
 “ terpret what God hath revealed ; and when
 “ any Doubt ariseth concerning the Meaning of
 “ any divine Revelation (as that of the holy
 “ Scriptures) we are to govern ourselves, in the
 “ Interpretation of it, by what is most agreeable
 “ to the natural Notions which we have of God,
 “ and we have all the Reason in the World to
 “ reject that Sense which is contrary thereto *.

I shall proceed upon these Principles to examine
 what his *Grace* has said to prove *Abraham's* Con-
 duct, in this Affair, reasonable. The first Ob-
 jection which naturally occurs against this Revela-
 tion's being from God, is, the horrid Appearance
 of the Action, that a Father should slay his inno-
 cent Son. But, says his *Grace*, “ Why should
 “ *Abraham* scruple the doing this, at the Com-
 “ mand of God, who being the Author of Life,
 “ hath Power over it, and may resume what he
 “ hath given, and take away the Life of any of
 “ his Creatures when he will, and make whom he
 “ pleaseth Instruments in the Execution of his
 “ Command? ” † I humbly presume this is
 viewing the Matter thro' a false *Medium*. It is not
 disputed what God, by Virtue of his *Omnipotence*,
 can or cannot do ; but what a Being who acts ac-
 cording to the Fitness of Things, will do. If
 the Command was fit, and that Fitness evident,
 then *Abraham*, from the Nature of the Thing, was
 bound to obey it : But if human Reason could not
 discover that Fitness, then must the Circumstances
 which rendered it fit (provided it was so) have
 been discovered in a supernatural Way ; yet, ac-
 G cording

* Tillot. Works, Vol. II. p. 13.

† Ibid. Vol. I. p. 177, 178.

cording to *Moses*, we don't find that they were. Therefore, as the Reason of the Command was not included in the Revelation, *Abraham*, according to his *Grace*, had no certain Ground to believe that the Revelation came from God; nay, he had, on the contrary, the highest Reason to disbelieve it, "because (to use his *Grace's* own Words) we
 " have no other Way to judge what is worthy of
 " God, and credible to be revealed by him, and
 " what not, but by the natural Notions which we
 " have of God, and his essential Perfections:
 " Which, because we know him to be immutable,
 " we have Reason to believe he will never contra-
 " dict." So this Revelation being contrary to an Affection given to *Abraham* by a perfect and an immutable God, and no Reason offered on the Side of the Revelation to support it; 'tis plain that it could not cancel the Obligation of this Affection; for the Obligation of no Affection can be cancelled, except by a Reason more cogent than that which made the Affection obligatory.

His *Grace* tells us, "That tho' God hath
 " planted strong Affections in Parents towards
 " their Children; yet he hath written no Law in
 " any Man's Heart to the Prejudice of his own
 " sovereign Right. This is a Case always excepted,
 " and this takes away the Objection of Injustice."*
 I readily grant that God hath written no Law in Mens Hearts to the Prejudice of his own Right; neither has he written any Law *there* to the Prejudice of their *Conscience*: Because as his *Grace* acknowledges, "This would be for God to destroy
 " his own Workmanship, and to impose that on
 " the Understanding of Men, which, whilst it
 " remains what it is, it can't possibly admit." It is, in my Opinion, a Contradiction to suppose that the sovereign Right of God can ever be
 pre-

* *Tillot, Works, Vol. II. p. 13.*

prejudiced by our acting reasonably ; because if it can, we must suppose that he has a Right to command us to act wrong ; and if his Right of commanding be greater than our Right of refusing, then we ought to obey, *i. e.* we should be in the Right in acting contrary to Right : Which is a Contradiction in Terms. There is no other Way which I can think of to evade this, but by supposing that the Will of God is that which constitutes Right and Wrong ; the Falsity of which I have endeavoured to shew in a former Letter.

His *Grace* proceeds next to consider the Scandal which must unavoidably have followed upon this Action of *Abraham's*, but, says he, " That could be no great Objection in those Times, when the absolute Power of Parents over their Children was in its full Force, and they might put them to Death without being accountable for it. So that then it was no such startling Matter to hear of a Father putting his Child to Death.* 'Tis true, before Men formed themselves into civil Societies, they lived in Families which were as much in a State of Nature with Respect to each other, as different Nations now are. The Master of every Family was a despotic Prince among his own Children and Servants. Yet will it from thence follow, that it would have been no Scandal upon him to put an obedient Son to Death ? tho' the Legislature in all Nations is invested with an absolute Power over his, or their Subjects ; yet whoever so far abuses this Power as to put the Innocent to Death, is always accounted a Tyrant and a Monster. So that it is impossible to free *Abraham* from the Scandal of this Action by saying that he had a Power of Life and Death over his own Children, unless it can be proved that they were as much his Property as his Cattle.

G 2

Neither

* Tillot. Vol. II. p. 13.

Neither would his Pretence to Revelation free him from Scandal; for, as his *Grace* very well observes, "the Act had an Appearance of so much Horror, that it was not easily credible that God should command it; and if every Man's confident Pretence to Revelation be admitted, the worst Actions may plead this in their Excuse: So that this Pretence would have been so far from excusing his Fault, that it must rather have been esteemed a high Aggravation of it, by adding the boldest Impiety to the most barbarous Inhumanity." *

There is another Objection may be made against this Revelation of *Abraham's*, which his *Grace* has taken no Notice of; yet I think it is an Objection of very great Moment: And it is this, *Abraham's* Conduct, in Consequence of his Revelation, gave his Son a Right to take away his Life.

In order to prove this, it will be necessary to inquire what Relation Children stand in to Parents, and what Duties result from that Relation.

Parents are the Instruments in the Hand of God in bringing Children into the World. Their Motive in doing this, does not so much arise from a Desire of propagating their Species, as to ease themselves of a certain Pain, or to enjoy some Object with which they are enamoured. And the wise Author of Nature hath made the Propagation of our Species a Consequence of that Enjoyment; this Consequence is not dependent upon the Will of the Parents, but is frequently against their Will. Tho' it be in the Power of Reason to check the violent Impulses of this Passion, which the different *Sexes* have for one another; yet these Impulses are not dependent on Reason, but on Custom, viewing beautiful Objects, or on a Constitution. Tho' an eminent *Father* of the Church † informs

* Tillot. Works, Vol. II. p. 13.

† St. Austin.

informs us, That *Adam*, before he fell, *potuit erigere membrum genitale ad voluntatis nutum*; and that the Motions consequent upon that Passion, were as much under the Direction of his Will as the Motions of his Fingers, yet the Matter is now quite otherwise, as I believe will be universally acknowledged.

After we are begotten, our Mothers are necessarily obliged to bring us forth. From all which, we lie under no Obligation to them, because the bringing us into the World was not the primary Cause which influenced them to use the Means, which Nature had connected with that End. Therefore the Obligations which we lie under to them can only arise from the Time we are born. As we came into the World in a helpless Condition, so we are obliged to them for preserving us, and supporting us, till we come to the Years of Maturity.

When we are born, and for a long Time after, we are not capable of governing ourselves, therefore Nature seems to have committed to our Parents, the Care of our Education, and the Government of us, till we come to the full Use of our Reason; and that they may be induced to discharge this Trust the more faithfully, she has implanted strong Affections in them, whereby they esteem our Good as dear to them as our own. After we are come to the full Use of our Reason, we become our own Masters; and though Interest, and the great Obligations which we lie under to our Parents, may make us pay a very great Deference to their Judgment, yet we can never be obliged to obey them contrary to our own Reason; because, as our Obedience is only founded on Reason, so it is impossible that it ever should overturn its own Foundation.

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Here I must observe, that Men are not to think, the Obligations which others lie under to them, on Account of their kind Services, hold an exact Proportion to the Advantage which may be reaped by these Services. I shall illustrate this by one Example. Suppose a Man who has fallen into a River, swims with the Current, so near the Bank, that I can, with great Safety to myself, catch hold of him, and thereby save his Life, which, otherwise, must inevitably be lost. Accordingly I do save him. Will it follow from this, that his Life is my Property, and that I may take it at Pleasure? By no Means. I can, in strict Justice, demand no more of him than a Compensation for my Trouble in saving him. And should I afterwards offer to kill him, he has a Right to kill me in his own Defence. And the Reason is plain; my Loss, or Trouble in saving him, is by no Means of equal Value with his Life. And as I demand that from him which is not my Right, so he has a Right to refuse me; and if I persist resolutely in my unjust Demand, he can lawfully take away my Life.

To apply this to the Case of Parents. They cannot, by Virtue of the Favours conferred on us, require us to do any Thing by which we must sustain a greater Loss than they have done by conferring these Favours. I own, this is not the Point of Light in which Children themselves ought to look upon the Matter; they are to consider their Parents as the Preservers of their Lives; these to whom they are (under God) bound for all that they enjoy; they are to obey their reasonable Commands; and always to treat them with that Tenderneſs with which they themselves were treated in their early Days: If their Parents in old Age should fall to Want, they are to cherish and support them to the utmost of their Power. Thus far

far, and thus far only, does the Duty of Children to their Parents extend.

From all which I think it is plain, that *Abraham* had by the Law of Nature no Right to take away the Life of his innocent Son ; neither had *Isaac* a Right to allow any Man to kill him, because being placed by Providence in this World, he was obliged to remain in it till it pleased God himself to call him forth. So that it was his indispensable Duty to hinder his Father from taking that which he had neither a Right to take, nor he a Right to give him. And if he could fall on no other Method to save himself, it was his Duty rather to kill his Father than violate the very first Principle of the Law of Nature. I do not know whether it may not be inferred from the History, that *Abraham* was sensible of all this ; for when *Isaac* asked him, *Where is the Lamb for the Burnt-offering?* Little thinking that he, poor Lad ! was to be the Sacrifice himself, he received an Answer which did not in the least discover his Father's Intentions, *My Son, God will provide himself a Lamb for a Burnt-offering.* And it is a very great Question if *Isaac* discovered *Abraham's* Intention, till after he was bound, and saw him stretch forth his Hand to take the *fatal Knife*, and then, alas ! it was too late for him to help himself.

I foresee an Objection which may be made to this Reasoning ; it may perhaps be said, that *Isaac's* Life was God's Property ; so after he had given *Abraham* a Right to take it away, *Isaac* could have no Right to defend it.

To this I beg Leave to answer, that *Abraham's* Revelation was by no Means binding upon his Son ; for as the most excellent *Archbishop* himself very well observes, “ A Revelation to another Man is
“ nothing to me, unless I be assured, that he hath
“ such a Revelation, which I cannot be, but either
by

“ by another immediate Revelation, or by some
 “ Miracle to confirm it *.” Now as all the Evi-
 dence which *Isaac* had to convince him that God
 did give such a Revelation, depended on the Vera-
 city of his Father, he could not be so sure that he
 would not deceive him, as he was, that it was his
 Duty to preserve his own Life ; and therefore
 could not be obliged to quit a greater Evidence for
 a lesser.

As a Conclusion to this Part of the Argument,
 I cannot forbear asking, Is it agreeable to the Cha-
 racter of the infinitely good and wise God, to
 give a Command which at once dissolves two of
 the strongest Ties in Nature, the reciprocal Af-
 fections of Parents and Children ?

Before I leave this Subject, I shall take some No-
 tice of a late anonymous *Author* † who has en-
 deavoured to defend the Reasonableness of *Abra-
 ham's* Conduct. “ He acknowledges, that it is
 “ absurd to imagine, it was the Intention of God,
 “ that *Abraham* should think such a monstrous
 “ Action (as the sacrificing his Son) could be his
 “ holy Will, or that *such a human Sacrifice* was
 “ not an Abomination to him : And that to ima-
 “ gine the contrary, is a most high Indignity to
 “ God, exceedingly absurd, and an Affront to his
 “ most holy Nature. But at the same Time, I
 “ deny, with Indignation, that ever it was God's
 “ Intention that *Abraham* should think so. Nay,
 “ I further affirm, that if the Breast of *Abraham*
 “ had harboured such a wicked Thought, he
 “ could never have received the divine Approba-
 “ tion ‡.” *Abraham* was expressly commanded
 to offer up his Son a Burnt-offering ; now he either
 must have believed that this Command came from
 God,

* Tillot. Works, Vol. II. p. 11.

† A Pamphlet, intitled, *The Case of Abraham, commanded
 to offer up his Son Isaac in Sacrifice, fairly reasoned.*

‡ Ibid. p. 42, 43.

God, or he must not; if he did not, why did he obey it? If he did believe that God gave the Command, he must likewise believe, it was his Will, that it should be obeyed; if so, he must necessarily conclude, that a human Sacrifice was acceptable to him. If, as this Gentleman seems to think, “ he was not at all satisfied in his own Mind, that the offering the human Sacrifice, “ could be acceptable to God †.” I ask, Why did he attempt to kill his Son till he was convinced? Is it in the least probable, that he would kill his Son, upon an Uncertainty? No; that can never be supposed, unless we say, that he was void of all natural Affection.

From the History it is plain, that *Abraham* was resolved to sacrifice his Son, for he carried the Knife, Wood, and Fire, necessary for that End, along with him; and it is an Absurdity which could never enter into his Mind, to think, that God would command him to do any Thing which he was certain was an Abomination to him. And as to what this Gentleman says of the Command, “ That it was a Command of Trial, and “ that it was never the Intention of God that “ it should be obeyed *,” it is nothing to the Purpose, for *Abraham* did not know so much.

I think, what I have said, sufficiently proves, that *Abraham* had no Reason to believe, that God commanded him to sacrifice his Son; and if we carefully attend to what *Moses* has said, perhaps we shall find no Reason to believe it either. And as an Introduction to our *Scripture Inquiry*, it will not be improper to repeat again, the Words of the most excellent *Archbishop*, from whom I have taken the Liberty to differ. “ By the Principles of Reason, says he, we are to interpret “ what God hath revealed; and when any Doubt

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“ ariseth

† Ibid. p. 62.

* Ibid. p. 44.

“ ariseth concerning the Meaning of any divine
 • Revelation (as that of the Holy Scriptures) we
 “ are to govern ourselves, in the Interpretation
 “ of it, by what is most agreeable to these natu-
 “ ral Notions which we have of God, and we
 “ have all the Reason in the world to reject that
 “ Sense which is contrary thereto.”

Moses's Words are, And it came to pass after these Things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham. And he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, take now thy Son, thine only Son Isaac, whom thou lovest; and get thee into the Land of Moriah; and offer him there for a Burnt-offering upon one of the Mountains which I shall tell thee of.* Here it is said, God tempted Abraham. Now, how did he tempt him? The Apostle James tells us expressly, *Let no Man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: For God cannot be tempted with Evil, neither tempteth he any Man†.* And the Reason of this is obvious, for as God himself always does what is fit; so he is willing that all other Beings should follow his Example; and therefore it is absurd to think that he will try Experiments upon his own Creatures, in order to know how foolishly they can behave.

Gen. 22. 1, 2. This Command of *Abraham's* was not fit in the Nature of the Thing; for if it had, God would have allowed him to obey it†. And as it was not fit, if God commanded it, we must say, that he commanded Things which were unfit; and this only to satisfy himself of the Folly of his own Workmanship; for it is impossible that an unfit Command can answer any good End, for then the Obedience consequent upon that Command would be fit, and at the same Time not fit, which is a Contradiction. If the Action was unfit before the (supposed) Command, it must have continued to be unfit after

* Gen. xxii. 1, 2.

† Jam. i. 13.

after it ; because the Will of God does not alter Things, nor the Relations which they stand in to one another, nor consequently the Fitness resulting from those Relations.

But how shall we reconcile all this with *Moses's* History ? Very well. In Scripture, God is frequently said to do those Things which he only permits others to do. Thus in one Place he is said to move *David* to number *Israel* * : † And yet in another Place we are told, that *Satan* provoked *David* to do that Action †. There is no other Way (which I know) of reconciling these two Accounts, except by saying, That *Satan*, by God's Permission, tempted *David* to number *Israel*. For it is inconsistent with my Notions of God, to suppose, that he will command any Man to do an Action, and then punish him for obeying that Command. We have another Instance of the like Kind in *Job*. Twice did God give *Satan* a Permission to afflict that good Man ; the first extended only to his Property, and accordingly the Devil, in a most unmerciful Manner, striped him of all he had ‡ : The second affected his Person. *Satan smote him with sore Boiles from the Sole of his Foot unto his Crown* ** : Yet we see, after he was freed from his Troubles, *There came to him all his Brethren, and all his Sisters, and all they who had been his Acquaintance before, and did eat Bread with him in his House : And they bemoaned him, and comforted him over all the Evil which the Lord had brought upon him* ††. Here the same Thing is ascribed to God, which we are told, in the Beginning of the Book, was done by *Satan* with God's Permission.

It is the Opinion of many learned Men, that this Book of *Job* was written by *Moses* himself ; and that all which he intended by it was, to shew his

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* 2 Sam. xxiv. 1. † 1 Chron. xxi. 1. ‡ Job i. 13 — 22.

** Ibid. ii. 7.

†† Ibid. xlii. 11.

Countrymen, that a good Man, patient under Affliction, and trusting to God, would at last be relieved, and an ample Recompence made to him for all his Sufferings, in order to make them hope for a Deliverance from their great Slavery. If it really was so, we find that he ascribes That to God, which he tells us was done by *Satan* with God's Permission.

It is said in other Places of Scripture, that God is the Author of Evil; and that he does Evil. *I form the Light and create Darkeness: I make Peace and create Evil: I the Lord do all these Things* *—*Shall there be Evil in the City, and the Lord hath not done it?* † Now as it would be the greatest Impiety to say that God does Evil; therefore all we can suppose to be meant by these Passages is, that God permits other Beings to do Evil. From all which I think it is plain, that the inspired Writers frequently describe the Deity as doing Things, which, even according to themselves, he only permits others to do.

To apply this Reasoning to our present Purpose; who tempted *Abraham*, since according to Reason and St. *James*, it could not be God? The Answer is easy; He either imagined he had a Revelation, which is most probable; or the *Devil*, the *common Tempter*, deceived him, and made him believe that it was God who spoke to him. Perhaps *Satan* thought that if he could cause *Abraham* to murder his Son, he would frustrate God's Promise; but his Scheme happily miscarried. The Angel of the Lord restrained the poor mistaken Man, when he was just upon putting his horrid Purpose in Execution. He commended his great Love for God, and promised that he should be blessed for it: And for nothing else could he commend him, since the Action was not approved of by Heaven.

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* If. xlv. 7. † Amos iii. 6.

It was Ignorance, or Inconsiderateness in *Abraham*, and proceeded from no bad Design against that Son, whom he so dearly loved. As his Intention in pleasing his God was good (his Fault lying in not considering the Nature of the Action, and its Incongruity to the Nature of God) tho' he was mistaken, yet was he commended for that good Intention.

I have, perhaps, been too long upon this Subject; but, considering the great Importance of it, I hope you will forgive me. If I have proved that God neither instituted Sacrifices at first; nor commanded *Abraham* to sacrifice his Son, I shall not think my Time ill spent: If I have failed in this, yet I hope the Goodness of my Intention will so far atone for the Badness of my Performance, as to free me from Censure at your Hands, when I assure you, that I have reasoned as well as I could; and that my only View was, to free God from the Imputation of such Actions, as were in my Opinion unworthy of him.

I would not have you infer from my reasoning in these Letters, that God did not command the *Jews* in after-times to sacrifice; or that he was not the Author of the *Mosaic Law*: For it will not bear such an Inference, as I shall shew you at large in another Letter. In the mean Time,

I am,

Your most humble Servant,

L E T-



LETTER V.

S I R,

OU say, notwithstanding the reasoning in my last, concerning the Case of *Abraham* offering up his Son *Isaac*; you cannot but still be of *Archbishop Tillotson's* Opinion, who says, "That God can work in the Mind of Man a firm Persuasion of the Truth of what he reveals, and that such a Revelation is from him" *. If so, say you, no Man can object to any Command which he is certain comes from God, unless he pretends to be wiser and better than his Maker; and this, you think, is sufficient to overturn what I have said.

In order to clear up this Matter, and to support my former Reasoning, I shall consider the Nature of those Revelations which require us to do any Action, and endeavour to prove, that we have no other Evidence to ascertain their Divinity, than what arises from the Nature of the Action commanded to be done.

Nothing, I believe, is more necessary to be considered in the Case of Revelations, than the Temper and Disposition of their Minds to whom they are made: Before a reasonable Man be persuaded that he hath a Revelation, he will consider, whether or no he had the perfect Use of his Reason, at the Time when he supposed it was made.

* Tillot. Works, Vol. II. p. 14.

made. If he was dreaming, in Drink, or under a melancholly Discomposure of Mind; I say, in any of these Cases he cannot depend upon it: Nor is it at all to be supposed, that a good and wise God, who requires that all Men should follow the Dictates of their Reason, will make Discoveries to them, when they want the Use of their Judgment.

When a Man is asleep; when all his Senses, which are, as I may say, the Avenues to the Soul, are shut up, how does his Fancy rove? What fantastical Ideas does it not present to his Mind? He then converses with Persons he never saw; and sees Things which never had Existence. Sometimes he is in Heaven, and has the Happiness to converse with God himself; at other Times, he unfortunately meets with the Devil, and finds himself under as great Pain and Uneasiness, as if Satan had been really present. But when he awakes, he beholds that it was a Dream, the Deceit of an ungoverned Imagination; if he does not, he is at this Day esteemed an Enthusiast.

It is true, Revelations were, in old Times, frequently made to Men when they were asleep. *Abraham* had one, declaring the Fate of his Posterity, when, it is said, *a deep Sleep fell on him, and lo, an Horror of great Darkeness fell upon him**. His Grandson *Jacob* dreamed, and beheld a Ladder set upon the Earth, and the Top of it reached unto Heaven: And beheld the Angels of God ascending and descending on it. And beheld the Lord stood above it, and said, *I am the Lord of Abraham thy Father, and the God of Isaac: The Land whercon thou liest to thee will I give it, and to thy Seed †.*—And *Jacob* awaked out of his Sleep, and said, *surely the Lord is in this Place, and I knew it not. ‡.* This probably being the first Time that he had dreamed any such Dream,

* Gen. xxviii. 13, 14. † Ibid. ‡ Ibid. 16.

Dream, *Moses* tells us, *he was sore afraid, and said how dreadful is this Place! This is none other but the House of God: And this is the Gate of Heaven* *. Now, I suppose, it will be granted that *Jacob* did not in reality see God, it follows that he only imagined he saw him; if so, might he not as well imagine that he heard him, for what greater Certainty had he, that he heard him; than that he saw him? If, in Reality, he both heard and saw him, I presume he must have been awake; for it would be somewhat strange to assert, that a Man can see Objects when his Eyes are shut.

Tho' *Jacob* might believe that this was a divine Revelation, yet, after relating all the Circumstances of it, (as that most faithful Historian *Moses* has done) perhaps, he might have found great Difficulty in proving to another, that it was not the Effect of his own Imagination. I am very far from denying that *Abraham*, and *Jacob* both, had many Revelations from God. I am only considering what Ground they had to believe, that those nocturnal Visions and Speeches were divine.

I shall suppose two Men asleep; the one has certain Ideas exhibited to his Mind by a Spirit; the other has the same Ideas exhibited by his own Imagination. At the Time of these Exhibitions, they are both convinced that they see the Objects, the Ideas of which are only presented to them. If they be the Ideas of Men, then they think they converse with them; see them do certain Actions, and perhaps assist them. Now after they awake, what greater Certainty has the one, for the Truth of this Dream, than the other? They were both convinced when they wanted the Use of their Reason; but on what Grounds do they continue to believe when awake. Tho' a Spirit might exhibit Ideas to the one, yet how does he know

* Gen. xxviii. 17.

know but that was the Work of his own restless Imagination? When he was asleep, he was so far from thinking that any Spirit influenced his Mind, that he really thought himself concerned in those (imaginary) Scenes of Action which were presented to him. If any Man has new Ideas exhibited to him when asleep, I own, he would have no small Reason to think, that they were exhibited by some Spirit. By a new Idea here, I do not mean the Composition of several Ideas which were in his Mind before; as the Idea of a *Satyr*, which is nothing but the Ideas of a Man and a Goat unnaturally compounded: But such Ideas as *Paul* probably had of Things which he heard and saw when caught up into the third Heaven; he tells, that *there he heard unspeakable Words* †, by which Expression I suppose he means, that the Ideas annexed to those Words, were different from those which Men have by Sensation and Reflection, and that they could no more be exhibited to them by Words, than the Idea of Light, to a blind Man. But we do not find that any such Ideas were ever presented to Men's Minds when asleep; and as the Imagination certainly can, and does produce all the Effects, which are ascribed to the Operations of Spirits; I should think myself very much obliged to any Man who would let me know how the one is to be distinguished from the other.

It is a common Observation, that Men are very apt to dream of those Things which mostly employ their Thoughts when awake. *Now after the Lord had said unto Abraham, Get thee out of thy Country, and from thy Kindred, and from thy Father's House, unto a Land, that I will shew thee, and I will make of thee a great Nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy Name great; and thou shalt be a*
I
Blessing.

† 2 Cor. xii. 4.

*Blessing. And I will bless them who bless thee, and curse him who curseth thee : And in thee shall all Families of the Earth be blessed **. After Abraham received this Promise, it is very natural to suppose, that he thought of it more than of any Thing besides, and, doubtless, frequently repeated it to his Son Isaac ; who failed not to do the same to Jacob. This famous Dream of Jacob's, above-mentioned, happened on the first Night after he left his Father's House. Isaac immediately before his Son went to Padan-arum, blessed him in these Words ; *God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayst be a Multitude of People : And give thee the Blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy Seed with thee ; that thou mayst inherit the Land whereon thou art a Stranger, which God gave to Abraham †*. There is no Doubt, but this parting Speech of a tender old Father, made a very great Impression on the young Man's Mind, both as it much concerned himself, and as he had good Reason to think that he should never see him again. As he could not fail to think of it very much as he travelled along the Road, so it is no Surprise to me, to find that he dreamed of it at Night. For this Dream, as well as most of Abraham's, was nothing but a Repetition of that Promise, which had been made over and over again long before.

Whether Moses, when he says, *that the Lord appeared to any Person in a Dream*, meant any more, than that such a Person dreamed the Lord appeared to him, I do not take upon me to determine ; yet that he could not think those nocturnal Revelations were as much to be depended on as those Revelations which were made to himself, may be inferred from this Passage. *And the Lord came down in the Pillar of the Cloud, and stood*

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* Gen. xii. 1—4.

† Ibid. xxviii. 3, 4.

in the Door of the Tabernacle, and called Aaron; and Miriam; and they came forth. And he said, Hear now my Words. If there be a Prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known to him in a Vision, and will speak unto him in a Dream: My Servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine House. With him will I speak Mouth to Mouth, even apparently, and not in dark Speeches, and Similitudes of the Lord shall he behold: Wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my Servant Moses †. If the Revelations, made in Dreams and Visions, are called dark Speeches, and Similitudes of the Lord, we are satisfied that a Revelation made in a dark and ambiguous Manner can scarce be called a Revelation at all; because, not knowing distinctly what Ideas the Revealer affixes to his Words, we cannot know what he means by them, nor consequently what he discovers.

As no Man can discern Revelations from Delusions when he is asleep, so, I believe, neither can he when he is drunk. In this Condition he is void of Reason; he is no Man; being as incapable of acting the Part of a rational Creature, as a Brute. The *Jews* committed great Mistakes in this Particular, Mr. *Dodwel* tells, That their Prophets drank Wine in order to obtain the *sacred Enthusiasm*, or prophetick Spirit*. I shall not at present dispute how far a moderate Glass might not be necessary to bring those into good Humour, “ who, as *Spencer* says, were of a morose,
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† Numb. xii. 5—9.

* In Judæorum sacrificiis incipiebant hymni & choreæ in laudem numinis, propterea ut videtur, quod post hilaritatem illam quam è vini hausta conceperant, aptiores viderentur sacro illi Enthusiasmo percipiendò quo sacra illa essent peragenda. Multis hæc probari poterant, ni vidissem Orationem potius esse contrahendam. Et vero corporeis id genus auxiliis Judæos usus esse constat ad concipiendum Spiritum Propheticum. *Dodwel de Jure Laic.* p. 359.

“ ill-natured, and infamously, obstinate Temper †.” Yet from the Prophet *Isaiab* (who by the Bye was a fine Gentleman) it appears, that they carried this Means of Inspiration quite too far; *The Priest and the Prophet, says he, have erred through strong Drink, they are swallowed up of Wine, they are out of the Way through strong Drink, they err in Vision, they stumble in Judgment **.

No Man can be sure that he has a Revelation made to him, when he is in a melancholly Disposition of Mind. Daily Experience convinces us, what odd and unaccountable Whims come into the Heads of those who are afflicted with the Vapours or Hypochondriac Melancholly. When any great Disorder happens in the nervous System, as when the Nerves are too tense, or too lax, a very sensible Alteration is produced in the Mind: In the former Case, Men turn mad, and distracted; in the latter, dull, and full of panic Fears. Tho’ these Disorders are of opposite Natures, yet I believe they are both productive of wild and extravagant Fancies, or imaginary Revelations. But more especially the latter, when the Nerves lose their natural Tone, and become too lax, the Mind is not supported in its Operations, nor has it that Courage and Intrepidity, which so much depends upon their proper Tensity; whenever it perceives any great Alteration of this Kind, it startles at the Thought, and being full of Fears, imagines no less than a Dissolution of the Animal OEconomy will ensue, and not being able to look Death chearfully in the Face, it forms to itself ten thousand Spectres and Apparitions, which make Revelations without Number.

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† *Natura gentem Hebræorum præter cæteros orbis Incolas ingenio moroso, difficili, & ad infamiam usque pertinaci finxit. Spencer de Leg. Heb. p. 628.*

* *Isa. xxviii. 7.*

It is not improbable that these Disorders of the Nerves, have considerably influenced the Minds of most of the *Religionists* which have appeared in the World. Very elastic Nerves may be the Cause of *Zealotism*; and, on the other Hand, Nerves too laxe, may produce those low, cringing, *Devotees*, who worship God from the same Principle that the *Indians* do the Devil; only that he may do them no Harm.

Women for the most part, having more delicate Constitutions than Men, receive stronger Impressions from outward Objects; and are generally great Proficients in the extatic Parts of Devotion. When they turn old, and their nervous Fluids begin to fail; they then enter upon a new Scene of Life, and earnestly apply themselves to the working out their Salvation with Fear and Trembling. At that gloomy Season, they spend much of their Time in reading melancholly and monkish Books, which disclaim all Pleasantry and Good-humour, so by Degrees, that Chearfulness, which is the great Security against all Enthusiasm, wears off; and as they still retain that Pride which is common to both Sexes, they begin to fancy themselves the peculiar Favourites of Heaven. Not allowing themselves even the Diversions with which they had been long accustomed, their Minds insensibly take an enthusiastick Turn, and they abound in Revelations. I knew one of those *Female Enthusiasts*, who, on every trifling Incident, would go to her Maker (as she termed it) and advise with him how to behave; if she did not get an immediate Answer, she would continue to fast and pray, till she mistook the Ravings of her own delirious Mind for Revelations, and by them did she square her Actions. I cannot say, but I have sometimes been diverted by hearing an old Woman relate the Story of her Conversion; how the Spirit wrought upon

upon her Mind ; subdued all her carnal Passions, and renewed her Will. In all which Time she was intirely passive to those Impressions from without. If I could judge of this spiritual Operation from its Effects, I think there was great need of renewing it, for she appeared to me, as positive, and her Will as perverse, as possibly her Husband could find it in her early Days. Enthusiasm, caused by Melancholy, generally produces such Fancies ; and Pride, and Self-conceit make them be believed.

Whether that kind of Inspiration, which in Scripture is called, *The Impressions of an evil Spirit from the Lord*, was any other than a nervous Distemper, I do not take upon me to determine. We read, *That the evil Spirit from the Lord was upon Saul, as he sat in his House with his Javelin in his Hand : And David played with his Hand. And Saul sought to smite David even to the Wall with the Javelin : But he slipt away out of Saul's Presence**. We need not doubt but that Saul was under great Uneasiness of Mind, to think that his Crown should not devolve upon his Son *Jonathan*, whose Character is not inferior to any, mentioned in the *Jewish History*. This certainly gave *Saul's* Mind (which naturally was great) a morose Turn ; and from any melancholly Tune play'd by him, on whom he had no small Reason to cast a jealous Eye, he might be spirited up to give Way to his Passion ; which perhaps is all that the Historian means, *by an evil Spirit*.

Having, as I think, proved, that no Man can be sure that he hath a Revelation made to him, when asleep ; in drink ; or under a melancholly Disposition of Mind : I shall now consider those Revelations, which are supposed to have been made

* 1 Sam. xix. 9, 10.

made to Men, when they had the right Use of their Reason.

In this Case then, when a Revelation is made which requires us to do any Action ; I presume, the first Thing to be considered, is the Nature of the Action, and from thence we are to infer, whether or no it be fit that we should do it. For from what I have said in my former Letters, I suppose you are convinced that God neither acts unreasonably himself ; nor requires any Thing of us, which he knows we cannot reasonably perform. If then, the Action is such as is worthy of God to command, it is our Duty to obey. If the Action be in itself, really evil, we may, from thence, reasonably conclude, that the Revelation was made by a wicked and malicious Spirit. Suppose that this Spirit, in order to induce us to obey, should work the greatest Miracles which can be conceived ; these Miracles cannot in the least influence our Conduct ; because in reality they prove no more, than that the Being which wrought them, had sufficient Power for that Purpose. They cannot alter the Nature of the Action, and make that Good, which in itself is Bad : Nor can they convince us that the Spirit which wrought them is Good ; when we are sure, from the commanding us to do an ill Action, that it is not so. Therefore we cannot as a Consequence of any Revelation, be obliged to do Actions, which we are certain, are not Good.

But when the Action commanded to be done, is of an indifferent Kind, *i. e.* of such a Kind, that we can neither see any good or bad Consequences flowing from it, how are we to behave ? The Being which commanded us to do the Action, must either have had some Reason for commanding, or it must be supposed a foolish Being. If it had a Reason, that Reason must have been
founded

Founded either on the fitness or unfitness of doing the Action ; therefore, tho' it appeared indifferent to us ; yet was it not really so, and as our doing it may be of bad Consequence, so we cannot be obliged to obey before we are satisfied of the Reasonableness of doing. Though the Being should declare unto us, that the Action will produce a very great Good, yet that is not sufficient ; because, being unacquainted with the Nature of the Being (it being impossible to discover that from the Nature of its Commands) we cannot reasonably take any Thing upon its Word. Miracles can avail nothing in the present Case, for they do not discover the moral Character of the Being which works them ; they are only Signs of Power, and it is possible, that a very powerful Being, may notwithstanding, be a very bad one.

Tho' the Spirit should tell us, that it has made many Revelations to us before, from which we have reaped great Advantages ; and that therefore we ought to be satisfied of its good Intentions towards us : Neither is this sufficient ; for, tho' we may have had Revelations before, yet whether or no those Revelations were made by this Being, we cannot know. Spirits are not the Objects of any of our Senses, and therefore, I believe, it is impossible, in this Life, to distinguish one from another. We have only their Veracity to trust to in this Case ; but how can we depend on that, unless we are convinced that they are Good, and how can we be convinced of that, except by the Goodness of their Commands ?

If there be any good Consequences flowing from the Action, which to us proves indifferent, these Consequences ought to be revealed likewise ; and if we perceive that they flow from the Action, it is our Duty to do it ; but if we cannot perceive that

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that, the Matter stands rather worse than before ; because, as the Spirit has told us its Reasons for giving the Command, and as we cannot find that they have any Force in them, we have the highest Reason to disobey : For if the Command came from God, we are certain he would not give us any Reason which we could not comprehend ; since an uncomprehensible Reason is, with Regard to the Person to whom it is given, no Reason at all. From all which, I think, it plainly follows, that we are not obliged as a Consequence of any Revelation, to do Actions before we are convinced that they will produce some Good.

We find from the *Jewish History*, that their famous General *Gideon*, was very sceptical with Regard to the Revelations which were made to him. When he was told by an *Angel*, that he should save *Israel* from the Hand of the *Midianites*, he modestly replied, *O my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel ? Behold my Family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my Father's House.** To which the Angel Answered, *Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one Man.* This only served to increase *Gideon's* Doubts, and from the Answer which he made, there is Ground to think he was afraid lest the whole was only the Effect of his own Imagination. *And he (Gideon) said unto him, if I have found Grace in thy Sight, shew me a Sign that thou talkest with me.* The Angel was so far from being disobliged at this reasonable *Scepticism*, that he wrought a Miracle in order to remove *Gideon's* Doubts, and to convince him that he talked to him in reality. And the Miracle had the intended Effect, for after it was wrought, it is said, *Gideon perceived that he was an Angel of the Lord.*

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* Judges vi. 15.

But it appears that even this Miracle did not satisfy his Mind of the Truth of the Revelation, for after he had got a great Army under his Command, before he undertook the Enterprize against the *Midianites*, the Historian tells us, that Gedeon said unto God, *if thou wilt save Israel by my Hand, as thou hast said, behold, I will put a Fleece of Wool on the Floor: And if the Dew be on the Fleece only, and it be dry upon all the Earth beside: Then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by my Hand, as thou hast said* *. Next Morning he found the Fleece wet, according to his Desire; but that did not satisfy him, for he said unto God, *let not thine Anger be hot against me, I will speak but this once, let me prove, but this once with the Fleece: Let it now be dry upon the Fleece, and upon all the Ground let there be Dew. And God did so that Night*. We see that Gideon's Scepticism was no way ill-pleasing to his Maker, on the contrary, all the Evidence which was required, was given. The Deity did not take his Infidelity amiss, being sensible it was no Crime; I wish some Men would take an Example from his Conduct in this Affair.

If when the Deity makes a Revelation, he works in the Mind of the Person to whom it is given, a firm Persuasion that it is from him; how could Gideon doubt, that God gave the Command to destroy the *Medianites*? For if he had been persuaded that it was God who commanded him, he would have been very unreasonable to demand Miracles to prove whether it was or no: And in that Case it is not to be supposed that God, who does nothing in vain, would work Miracles to convince a Man of any Thing which he already believed.

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* Judges vi. 15. † Ibid. 37.

I humbly presume, that when God is pleased to make Revelations of his Will to Men, he considers them as they really are; as rational Creatures, and submits what he says to their Judgment; for as long as he gives them Reason, they surely have a Right to use it, and to judge of every Action before they do it. But if by virtue of his *Omnipotence*, he supercedes the Use of their rational Faculties, in order to convince them of the Truth of his Revelations; he takes away the distinguishing Characteristick of Men; destroys the noblest Part of his own Workmanship; and makes Men more resemble Clock-Work than rational Creatures.

This methinks is unworthy of the perfectly good and wise God, all whose Commands must be reasonable; and the more they are inquired into, the more lovely they will appear. If it is not from the Nature of the Revelations themselves, that we are to judge of their Divinity, then may wicked Spirits find abundance of Methods to make us perpetrate the vilest Crimes, and at the same Time, by delusive Arts, persuade us, that we are obeying the Commands of God. Thus will God be found to have given us Reason to no purpose; if instead of obeying its Dictates, we are obliged to act directly contrary to them.

These, Sir, are my Reasons for adhering to the Principles of my last Letter, if you can overturn them, I shall think it a new Obligation laid upon me, for as I only want to find out Truth, I do not care on which Side of the Question it lies. *I am, &c.*

F I N I S.

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may stand, &c.

